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cations of these writers, as well as of those of several others, *e. g.*, Murray, Fite, and Lecky, have a general affiliation with the principle put forward by the present writer.

I submit that the growing interest in the psychological basis of ethics represents a tendency toward the mode of regard I have been urging. The classification proposed is merely a tentative illustration of the sort of thing that ought to be done, and must stand or fall according to the truth or falsity of the logical principles from which it is derived and according to its rigorous consistency with those principles. Strangely neglected as this problem has been, its solution appears absolutely necessary to the clear exposition and secure progress of ethics as a science.

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SPENCER AS AN ETHICAL TEACHER.

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A PHILOSOPHICAL treatment of ethics, and especially one which, like Spencer's, rests on a purely naturalistic basis, starts with the postulate of the unity of knowledge. The widest truths of ethics, like those of other sciences, cannot fully be realized except by reference to other branches of philosophy. No modern writer has shown the interdependence more clearly than Spencer, whose ethical theories are inextricably entangled with other parts of his work. We find this characteristic strikingly illustrated at the outset by his definition of conduct as action intelligently adapted to ends. Simple as the definition may be, its peculiar interest is found in its relation to his conception of life, the essential aspect of which he briefly describes as the "continuous adjust-

ment of internal relations to external relations." This conception, when the factor of intelligence is introduced, becomes practically identical with the adaptation of means to ends, and conduct becomes identical with all vital actions in so far as they imply purpose and intelligence.

The biological reference of Spencer's ethics also appears in his view of the basis of moral purpose. By him, morality is not regarded as something separate and distinct from other natural processes, but as a factor in the life of man, who is himself a part of the greater cosmic unity. As a living organism, man's first and supreme end is survival, of himself as an individual, of his family, of the society of which he forms a part. Where these motives clash, we find the thorny problems of ethics; but, before we consider these, we must note the fundamental truth that morality, being a faculty of man, is concerned with survival. In its primary aspect, good conduct is that which tends to survival, which points to life rather than to death, which helps to the fullest enjoyment of life, in ourselves and in others.

Such a treatment leads at once to the problem of hedonism, a problem which previous thinkers had treated on purely empirical lines. It is interesting to note the manner in which evolutionary philosophy, as represented by Spencer's work, confirms or modifies the conclusions that would be drawn from ordinary empirical reasoning. Spencer's contribution to the discussion consists of an emphatic decision in favor of hedonism, using the term in its widest possible significance. He points out that, in the light of evolution, pleasure is the indication nature gives us that our actions are beneficial, pain is nature's warning that something is wrong. Any species which, as a rule, found pleasure in actions leading to death rather than to life, would perish in competition with others better fitted to their environment.

It must, however, be noted that Spencer's interpretation of the term pleasure is wider than that of the opponents of hedonism, who often quote the well-known phrase:

"It is better to be a man dissatisfied than a pig satisfied." Phrases of this kind show how the terms happiness and pleasure are often used as if they referred only to the lower sensual feelings. If by the pursuit of happiness we mean (which no hedonistic philosopher ever did mean) the search for the lower personal gratifications independent of the well-being of others, needless to say the hedonistic ideal is false; but, from the broadest standpoint, to assert that pleasure, happiness, well-being,—call it what you will,—is the rightful end of conduct, is to state what is almost a truism.

This general truth is subject to important exceptions, which are, indeed, so obvious that many thinkers have lost sight of the fact that they are exceptions. A species, which, for many eras, has existed under stationary conditions, will probably be so adapted to its environment that all pleasurable actions will be beneficial, and all painful actions harmful. But man, who, in a few generations compared with the eras that have preceded him, has advanced from a nomadic, hunting, solitary life to a complex and settled civilization, is not so constituted. With him it is not surprising that, in many ways, the modification of his desires has not kept pace with the needs of his changing conditions. The power of continuous and settled work, the consideration of the rights and feelings of others, the renunciation of temporary and doubtful gratifications for future and certain benefits, are all qualities not sufficiently developed in the average man.

Here arises the necessity for the sense of duty, which is specially concerned with the exceptions to the law on which hedonism is based. Concerning the necessity and the vital importance of the sense of duty, in our present stage of civilization, no doubt is possible. Nevertheless, we must note that this sense represents an exception to the general law of life, and its meaning is misunderstood if it is interpreted in any other way. When we say that it is often imperative to sacrifice immediate

pleasure to future happiness, we express an undoubted fact of experience. If we assert that it is often praiseworthy for the individual to sacrifice himself for the benefit of others, whether those immediately surrounding him or society at large, we enunciate a truth, the practice of which is essential to human survival and to social stability. If we advance from this to infer that discomfort, privation, and suffering are in themselves praiseworthy, we confuse means with ends and cast discredit on the maxims of social well-being by associating them with great and dangerous falsehoods.

Spencer's interpretation of the meaning of the sense of duty, epitomized in the preceding paragraphs, suggests a further deduction from the same line of thought. Although there are occasions when duty impels us to do what is unpleasant both to ourselves and to others, we may infer that this necessity, in the history of the race, is but temporary. With further evolution, the breach between man's inclinations and the actions which duty impels him to perform will diminish. As civilization progresses, what is now duty will become happiness.¹

The sound philosophical interpretation of ethics, which we have briefly outlined, is the basis upon which Spencer proceeds to treat more special problems in his own scientific way. His tripartite division of conduct as conducive to self-preservation, preservation of offspring, and of society, calls for no comment here. We can also pass by his interesting and logical division of the problems of ethics in relation to physics, biology, psychology, and sociology. Embedded in this scientific classification, there are to be found many interesting discussions. To mention two only, Spencer's treatment of the ethical value of sympathy and of the relation between egoism and altruism deserve careful study and attention. The greater part of his opinions on these matters, however, will probably be generally accepted, and so we will pro-

¹"Data of Ethics," pp. 126-131.

ceed to criticise those views in the advocacy of which he differed from his contemporaries, and from the great empiricists who preceded him.

Of these points of difference one of the most important is his own caste of utilitarianism. Though, in some respects, as utilitarian as Bentham, he repeatedly asserts that the aspect of causation did not, in the work of the other utilitarians, receive its due meed of attention. He considered that rules of right conduct should not only be obtained by induction, but by deduction from the nature of man and of the conditions under which he lives. The following extract illustrates his 'rational utilitarianism,' which is entirely distinct from the empirical utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill.

The view for which I contend is that Morality properly so called,—the science of right conduct,—has for its object to determine how and why certain modes of conduct are detrimental, and certain other modes beneficial. These good and bad results cannot be accidental, but must be necessary consequences of the constitution of things; and I conceive it to be the business of Moral Science to deduce, from the laws of life and the conditions of existence, what kinds of action necessarily tend to produce happiness and what kinds to produce unhappiness. Having done this, its deductions are to be recognized as laws of conduct; and are to be conformed to irrespective of a direct estimation of happiness or misery ("Data of Ethics," p. 57).

The problem resolves itself into one that is practical rather than theoretical, and the critic will naturally ask himself how far it is practically possible, by deduction from the constitution of things, to obtain authoritative ethical principles. The *a priori* method is undoubtedly possible in theory, but it is doubtful to what extent it is allowable in practice. In Spencer's ethics, the method is used, so far as I am aware, in only one important instance. His formula of Justice, Spencer ruthlessly carried out to what appeared to be its logical conclusion. Very few, even of his warmest admirers, consider this application successful. The failure to make greater use of this method, and to convince others of the validity of his one application, will incline most critics to decide

that, while the aspect of causation is a necessary addition to utilitarian theory, on the plane of practical life Mill's view is somewhat nearer the truth. The most philosophical attitude would appear to be, to recognize the theoretical possibility of the *a priori* method, but to criticise with great care any attempt to put it into practice.

The difference between various types of thinkers is one of degree rather than of kind. All will agree that a number of well established moral principles, such as those forbidding murder and theft, are binding even if their observance temporarily necessitates a balance of misery; but, even in this extreme instance, few would award severe condemnation to the starving man who steals bread. It may be possible to state moral injunctions in such a way as to allow for exceptional circumstances. Any philosopher who does this will bring the science one stage nearer Spencer's ideal. But, under present conditions, we are accustomed to say that the spirit rather than the letter should be observed, and in so doing we imply that the latter is not absolute. When we travel outside a few simple cases, the exceptions become more numerous and the validity of moral principles less absolute. This practical point of view Spencer fully recognized in his distinction between absolute and relative ethics, but he did not seem fully to realize how theoretical the distinction between rational and empirical utilitarianism would thereby become. His treatment has the credit of affiliating moral principles to evolutionary theory; but otherwise he has not greatly affected ethical thought.

Another problem, which bears some relation to the last, is that of the value of moral intuition, or conscience, as a guide to conduct. On this point Spencer's ethical work seems to speak with a somewhat uncertain voice, as the following quotations will show :

I also hold that just as the space intuition responds to the exact demonstrations of Geometry and has its rough conclusions interpreted and verified by them; so will moral intuitions respond to the demonstrations of Moral Science, and will have their rough conclusions interpreted and verified by

them. . . . The doctrine of innate powers of moral perception becomes congruous with the utilitarian doctrine when it is seen that preferences and aversions are rendered organic by inheritance of the effects of pleasurable and painful experience in progenitors (pp. 123-4).

Here is a powerful argument in favor of the authority of conscience. On the other hand, as no one points out more clearly than Spencer, the deliverances of conscience vary greatly with the individuals, and with time and space.

By the hypothesis (of the intuitionist) the wrongness of murder is known by an intuition which the human mind was originally constituted to yield. . . . But if you ask an adherent of this doctrine to contrast his intuition with that of a Fijian, who, considering murder an honorable action, is restless till he has distinguished himself by killing someone; no course is open save that of showing how conformity to the one conduces to well-being, while conformity to the other entails suffering, individual and general (p. 39).

On this question his final opinion is best expressed by the following passage: "The facts cited, chapter after chapter, unite in proving that the sentiments and ideas current in each society become adjusted to the kinds of activity predominating in it." ("Principles of Ethics," p. 471.)

But even here our ground is hardly bed-rock. The condition of societies is continually changing, and the consciences and sentiments of the individuals are also variable. The life of a society comprises but a small number of generations in the history of the race; so an inherited conscience, dependent on the constitution of society, can never attain to the reliability which accrues to our fundamental intuitions of space and time. The latter are formed, not only during the whole history of the human race, but, in their cruder forms, in the immeasurable vista of preceding ancestral organisms. Once again we seem to be thrown back on the empirical position. While the dictates of conscience have, from their very existence, a high degree of authority, and, as a rough and ready guide, should never be ignored; yet, when we remem-

ber the number of factors such as inheritance, environment, education, which go to make up the complex known as conscience, we can hardly give to it absolute validity or pay to it superstitious reverence.

Once again, evolutionary philosophy holds out a hope for the future. As civilization becomes more settled and the nature of man better adapted to the conditions under which he lives, we may expect that human moral intuitions will become better and more trustworthy guides. Possibly the intuition of conscience is but the first step by which the feelings of man and the actions which the welfare of society demands, will ultimately be harmonized.

Another doctrine of Spencer's ethics, which has occasioned some controversy and misunderstanding in academic circles, is his exposition of the relation between what he calls absolute and relative ethics. The term absolute is somewhat ambiguous. In this connection it has no reference to metaphysical controversy, nor does it, as some critics very inaccurately inform us,² imply that it is now possible to say what the ultimate state of society may be, and what morality will be fitted for it. The meaning will be best understood if for absolute we substitute the simpler word ideal. To Spencer, ethics was not merely a theoretical study for academic students, but a means of determining what actions we should accomplish here and now. It must therefore be practical. At the same time, it is clear that many of our acts, the best that opportunity and circumstances allow, can only be defended because of the imperfect state of man and of society. We need some criterion more stable and more absolute. This criterion Spencer found in his postulate of hedonism. Adopting, as he does, the utilitarian standpoint, and basing his ethics on the assumption that happiness is the rightful end of conduct, a policy would be absolutely right, would satisfy the requirements of ab-

² See, for example, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Vol. 32, Article: Herbert Spencer.

solute ethics, if, and only if, it conduced to the benefit of all and occasioned harm and injury to none. In short, to express the idea in plain common-sense language, if an act does harm to anyone, it is to that extent wrong.

Spencer's conception is open to some objections. The term absolute ethics is misleading. It is also possible to remark that actions which are pleasurable and beneficial to all concerned would spontaneously be performed and would require no ethical sanction. Ethics would thus be obsolescent. The paradox, however, is perhaps more apparent than real. Is it not possible to say that the object of ethics may be to produce a state of society in which it would no longer be required? Indeed, whatever the future may disclose, is it not probable that some such ideal may be accomplished?

In a world where man has unraveled some of the entanglements in which poor humans are involved, it may even be possible to act so that none would suffer pain. But ideals are diverse. The State and the individual may become related to each other in many ways. We may, like the ants, attain a condition where the individual is nothing and the community everything. We may find that social control will obsolesce and that untrammelled individuals will live their lives neither wronging their neighbors nor wishing to do so. Whatever may be the changes that the future will bring us, the confusion of the present day must ultimately cease. In one way or in another, the relation between man and man must be more settled, and the individual must become adapted to the conditions in which he lives. If he cannot adapt the environment to himself, he must adapt himself to his environment. When he does so, in whatever way this change takes place, the desires of mankind must ultimately identify themselves with what it is possible to accomplish. Private wishes and public good must, in the end, be more in harmony.

Unfortunately, in this imperfect world, it often happens that absolutely right conduct, in the Spencerian

sense of the word, is not attainable by any conceivable line of action. Every possible alternative involves harm to some one somewhere. In such cases, the principles of relative ethics impel us to choose the course which, to the best of our judgment, will ultimately accomplish the maximum of benefit and the minimum of harm. In so choosing, we shall obtain most valuable assistance by noting, and so far as possible following, "those fundamental moral intuitions which have been and are developing in the race." There is nothing very striking or original in this view of conduct. Though it is improbable that any previous writer has handled the question precisely on these lines, the maxims will appear to most simply an organized common-sense view. Yet, as so explicitly stated, it has the advantage of acting as a check on those who, by setting up impossible and entirely impracticable standards of conduct, discredit ethical principles which can in practice be observed. An admission, or even an emphatic assertion, of the inapplicability of an ideal code of ethics to all the circumstances of human life is not only consistent with a very high standard of conduct, but the very first step toward showing in a practical way that ethical principles have an actual bearing on everyday life.

It is particularly noteworthy that Spencer, who is commonly accused of using the *a priori* method excessively, in this discussion concerning absolute and relative ethics, where his teaching touches practical life, is so commendably free from dogmatism and preconceived opinion. Here, as in other parts of his work, he admirably illustrates the truth that often the teachings of philosophy coincide with the dictates of an enlightened common sense.

The last of the special questions which arises from a study of Spencer's ethics is perhaps the most fundamental of all. It may shortly be stated as the problem of motive. As his system of ethics is founded on an evolutionary basis, the question naturally arises what, in such a system, is the meaning of 'ought.' Nature, they say,

is non-moral. Survival of the fittest implies no survival of the most moral. Some might therefore be doubtful of the meaning and consistency of the evolutionist when he uses the ethical imperative.

On this matter, it is easy to point out that much of the current talk concerning the non-morality of nature is based on one or two patent fallacies. When the preacher discourses on the distinction between the natural and the spiritual man, we know fairly well what he means; but, in the philosophical sense, it is necessary to demur that the term nature includes both sides of our being. It is also a mistake to assume that only with mankind is co-operation and mutual help to be found. The animal world supplies countless instances of this kind, less highly developed than ours as are all their activities, but existent none the less. Those very attractive and striking phrases, "Nature red in tooth and claw," and "The ape and the tiger are with us yet," though they have a real and legitimate meaning, are liable to lead the unthinking astray. It is easy and obvious to point out that even so unsocial an animal as the tiger does not, as a rule, prey on its own kind, but on other species. If, for purposes of illustration, we may endow a sheep or a bullock with a knowledge of its own lot and destiny, we can well imagine that it would, from its own standpoint, make small distinction between the man and the tiger.

Like all other sides of our being, we shall find the roots of our moral sentiments in the animal world, and it is as little allowable for us to imagine that these are new or special to man, as it is to say that our wars and barbaric instincts are non-natural, because the animal world can supply no parallel to the organized and useless slaughter of thousands by their own kind, which we find in the battles of modern history. The motives for moral action, in a world such as ours, are patent and obvious. The evolutionist, when he uses the ethical imperative, means very much the same thing as others who use the same terms. All in varying degrees possess a moral

sense. All in varying degrees desire the good opinion of those with whom they are thrown in contact. Which motive is most potent, is an individual problem concerning which it is impossible to formulate general rules.

Indeed, it is impossible to compare ethical and mystical motives. The two are incommensurable. Nor are they necessarily inconsistent. There can be little doubt that, to the mystic who believes himself to have received personal revelation of the Divine, the effect on life may be intense. But, unless we can place the ground of action on a more general foundation, we are without a criterion of right and wrong. The deliverances of the religiously inspired must still be tried at the bar of reason, and must be rejected unless they can in the end justify themselves at that tribunal. Otherwise we are open to the anarchy of a host of individual Brigham Youngs and Dowies. It is a necessary assumption of human life that reason, in the end, will not lead us astray. The problem of the validity of other sanctions it would not be relevant to discuss. Evolutionary philosophy, as such, is neither theistic nor antitheistic; but it is a function of such a philosophy to show that morality is a part of, and not apart from, the greater cosmic unity, the existence of which each may interpret in his own way. Meanwhile, the study of ethics points out and classifies reasons for that which the consensus of civilized mankind has universally termed the right. Whether or not the code is inspired or divinely given, we can by patient study find out, in the main, what is right here and now. To those who possess a highly developed moral sense this is sufficient. But ethics can do more than that. To those who have not that instinctive feeling, it can point out motives to which none can be indifferent. An entire absence of, or an abnormal deficiency in, moral sense is found with very few, and such cases present difficulties to moral teachers whatever the sanctions of their code; but, even here, ethics can offer the whole gamut of motives, from the terrors of the law for the worst cases of antisocial

conduct to the good or bad opinion of those with whom the offender comes in contact,—an influence to which all are subject. Once again, it is not possible to make general rules. Those motives are best which are most operative. When the decision concerning what is right or wrong has been made in the light of reason, let each find his own reasons for doing the right and avoiding the wrong.³

It will be best to estimate Spencer's place as an ethical teacher apart from the very controversial doctrines of his social ethics. His warmest admirer cannot but admit that, considered as an ethical treatise, the work is not without faults both of commission and of omission. One of the most obvious omissions is the absence of the emotional factor. Spencer's cold rationality, which so enhances the value of his sociology, is a drawback in a work on ethics. The mass of mankind is more often swayed by emotion than by reason, and the best courses and most rational causes will seldom prevail against serious opposition if emotion and enthusiasm be not evoked. Not only is the emotional element almost entirely absent from his ethical treatise,—this is perhaps not very surprising in a philosophical work,—but Spencer makes no attempt to deal with the question how, and when, and to what extent, emotion and enthusiasm should be and can be enlisted in favor of those lines of action which, our reason assures us, are in accordance with our own best interests and with the welfare of the community. This omission is liable to give the very false impression that evolutionary ethics is, of necessity, unemotional.

Again, Spencer's own peculiar faults of manner and style are more accentuated here than in other parts of

³ See also on this point "Principles of Ethics," Appendix C. It seems to me, however, that Spencer does not do himself justice in ignoring entirely the religious motive. In the concluding paragraphs of the *Unknownable* he states a principle which we may well imagine to be the explanation of his own life, and of his devotion to the ideas he did so much to advocate.

his philosophy. This is possibly due to the fact that the greater part of the "Principles of Ethics" was written at the end of his days, in failing health and under other serious disadvantages. When every admission has been made, few of those competent to judge would be rash enough to deny that Spencer's ethics is a great and valuable work. If his ethical conclusions are not of such revolutionary importance as his additions to other branches of knowledge, this is not surprising. A new and fertile conception like Spencer's idea of universal evolution is not likely to revolutionize ethics,—a branch of human faculty which has for many centuries received so much attention from philosophers and from ordinary men, and in which so much has been worked out empirically,—to the same extent as it has affected the newer sciences of biology, psychology, and sociology.

Nevertheless, considered as a philosophical treatise on fundamental principles, rather than a popular and detailed work, which indeed it was not intended to be, there can be no doubt that it contains much that is both original and true. To mention one conception only, his view of the future evolution of the race ultimately harmonizing the feelings and emotions of the individual with the needs of the community is a contribution of great value. Again, his analysis of the roots of true conduct, as viewed under their various aspects, is a masterly piece of work, well worthy of a place in the philosophy.

Although, in the opinion of many, Spencer's additions to ethics will not rank so high as other parts of his philosophy, it would be difficult to find any modern thinker whose ethical work is more original, and more likely to be of permanent value, than that of our great evolutionary philosopher.

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